

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An information processing apparatus for studying a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising:

5 request means for requesting a first inspector to study the target case; and

 detection means for detecting access to a database relating to the target case by the first inspector.

10 2. The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

 report means for reporting a detection result obtained by said detection means to a requester who has requested the first inspector to study the case.

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3. The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said report means checks an access state by the first inspector at predetermined time intervals, and issues a predetermined reminder when no access is
20 detected a predetermined time after the request.

4. The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:

25 suspension means for suspending a request from a requester who has requested the first inspector to study the case at an instruction of the requester.

5. The apparatus according to claim 4, further comprising:

re-request means for requesting a second inspector different from the first inspector at an inspection of the requester to accept a request of a requester who has requested the first inspector to study the case.

6. An information processing method for studying a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising the steps of:

requesting a first inspector to study the target case; and

detecting access to a database relating to the target case by the first inspector.

7. An program storage medium storing a program for realizing an information processing method for studying a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising:

a code for requesting a first inspector to study the target case; and

a code for detecting access to a database relating to the target case by the first inspector.

8. An information processing apparatus for studying a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising:

a table relating to organization information; and
management means for selectively performing by
referring to said table a first study management mode
in which the target case is studied through a
5 predetermined path, and a second study management mode
in which an inspector who inspects the target case
sequentially requests a subsequent inspector to study
the case.

10 9. The apparatus according to claim 8, wherein
said table relating to the organization
information indicates a hierarchical management
structure in a company.

15 10. The apparatus according to claim 8, further
comprising:
a study path pattern table storing a plurality of
patterns of study paths for the first study management
mode.

20 11. The apparatus according to claim 8, wherein
in the second study management mode, a request for
study is issued by specifying a name of an inspector
without using said table relating to the organization
25 information.

12. An information processing method for studying

a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising the steps of:

referring to a table relating to organization information; and

- 5 performing a managing step by selectively performing based on said referring step a first study management mode in which the target case is studied through a predetermined path, and a second study management mode in which an inspector who inspects the
- 10 target case sequentially requests a subsequent inspector to study the case.

13. A program storage medium storing a program for realizing an information processing method for
- 15 studying a target case by communicating information through a network, comprising:

a code for referring to a table relating to organization information; and

- a code for realizing a managing step by
- 20 selectively performing based on said referring process a first study management mode in which the target case is studied through a predetermined path, and a second study management mode in which an inspector who inspects the target case sequentially requests a
- 25 subsequent inspector to study the case.

14. An information processing apparatus for

generating a document relating to a patent application
by communicating information through a network,
comprising:

association means for dividing a patent
5 application procedure into a plurality of steps, and
associating a reference document used in generating a
document in step units with a due date of generation of
the document; and

management means for managing generation of the
10 document.

15. The apparatus according to claim 14, wherein
said plurality of steps contain an application and
a rejection reason response.

16. The apparatus according to claim 14, wherein
said management means manages generation of the
document by making links to a management database for
item management and a document database for document
20 management.

17. The apparatus according to claim 14, wherein
said management means manages generation of the
document by defining a virtual file in a network.

25 18. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein
a timing of generating a file is defined in said

step units relating to the virtual file.

19. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein
a process performed when a file is generated is
5 defined in said step units relating the virtual file.

20. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein
a timing of extinguishing a file is defined in
said step units relating to the virtual file.

10 21. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein
a process performed when a file is extinguished is
defined in said step units relating the virtual file.

15 22. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein
a related document is defined in said step units
relating to the virtual file.

20 23. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein
a study and approval path is defined in said step
units relating to the virtual file.

24. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein
said virtual file can be copied, and
25 simultaneously distributed through a network using a
plurality of paths.

25. An information processing method for generating a document relating to a patent application by communicating information through a network, comprising the steps of:

- 5 dividing a patent application procedure into a plurality of steps, and associating a reference document used in generating a document in step units with a due date of generation of the document; and managing generation of the document.

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26. A program storage medium storing a program for realizing an information processing method for generating a document relating to a patent application by communicating information through a network,

- 15 comprising the steps of:

 a code for dividing a patent application procedure into a plurality of steps, and associating a reference document used in generating a document in step units with a due date of generation of the document; and

- 20 a code for realizing a managing step of managing generation of the document.

27. An information processing apparatus for accumulating technical documents relating to a patent application, comprising:

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 accumulation means for accumulating a related technical document including a corresponding foreign

application for the patent application; and

display control means for displaying a list of technical documents of a patent application accumulated in said accumulation means.

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28. The information processing apparatus according to claim 27, wherein

said display control means displays a flag indicating whether or not a prior art disclosure procedure has been performed on the technical document.

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29. The information processing apparatus according to claim 27, wherein

said display control means displays descriptions indicating correspondence between the technical document and a rejection reason.

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30. The information processing apparatus according to claim 27, wherein

said display control means displays a list of applications by which the technical document has been cited relating to the technical document.

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31. An information processing method for accumulating technical documents relating to a patent application, comprising the steps of:

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accumulating a related technical document

including a corresponding foreign application for the patent application; and

displaying and controlling a list of technical documents of a patent application accumulated in said accumulation step.

32. A program storage medium storing a program for realizing an information processing method for accumulating technical documents relating to a patent application, comprising the steps of:

a code for realizing an accumulation step of accumulating a related technical document including a corresponding foreign application for the patent application; and

a code for realizing a displaying and controlling step of displaying a list of technical documents of a patent application accumulated in said accumulation step.